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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
1 November 1966

State Department review completed

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

Light contact between US and Communist forces was reported in Quang Tri and Pleiku provinces (Paras. 1-2). A US minesweeper was attacked and sunk in one of the sea lanes to Saigon; elsewhere, US boats and helicopters encountered a large Viet Cong sampan force in the Mekong Delta (Paras. 3-6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

The Constituent Assembly elected a young northern lawyer as chairman of the important constitution drafting committee on 31 October (Paras. 1-3). Government officials in the Hue area have recently been alternating measures of firmness and conciliation in light of reports that the "struggle movement" might soon resume there (Para. 4).

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V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi's treatment of the recently concluded Congress of the Japanese Communist Party is a good example of Hanoi's willingness to adopt a line contrary

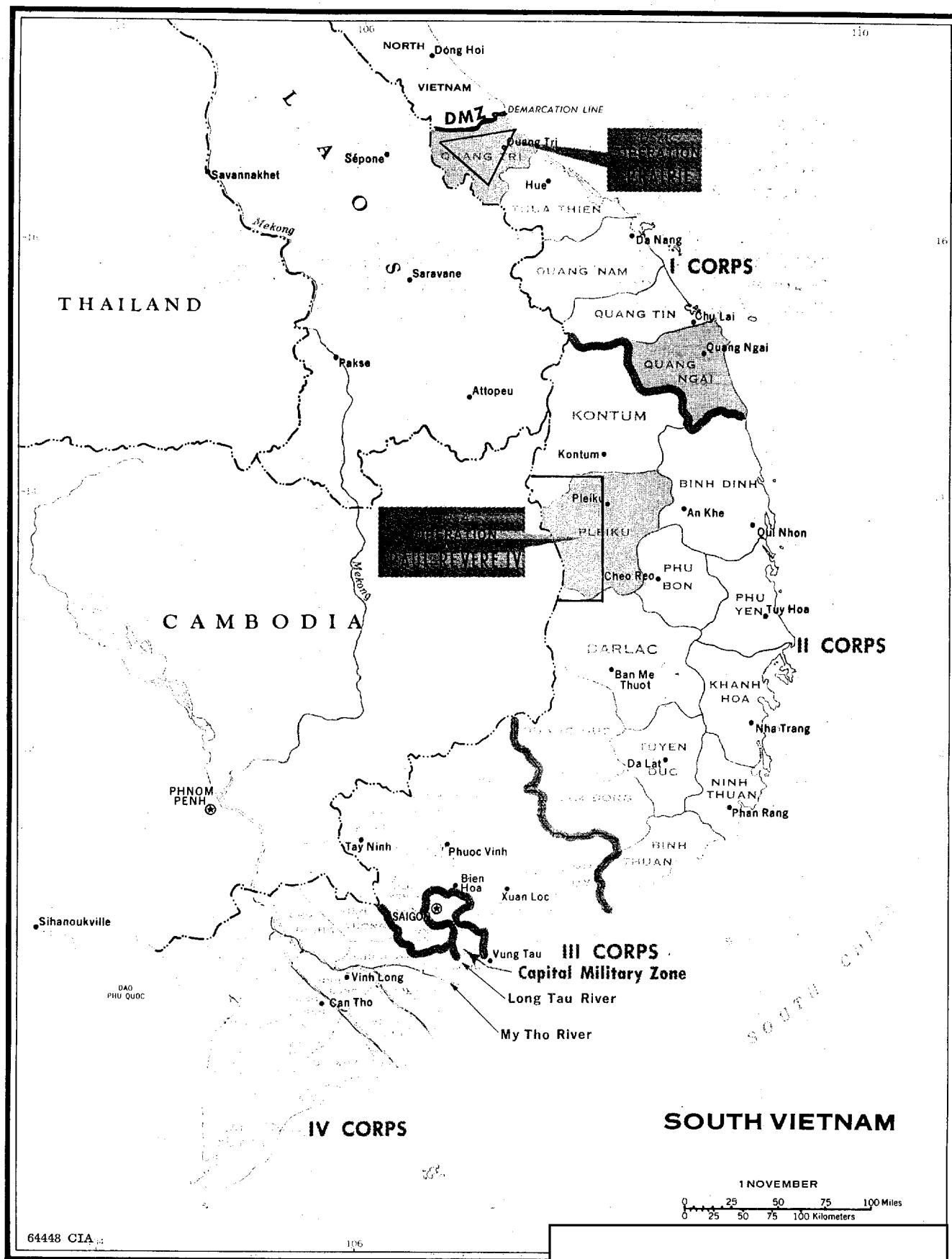
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to Peking's in matters relating to the Sino-Soviet

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VI. Other Major Aspects: The level of truck traffic through the Mu Gia Pass has probably been reduced in recent weeks as a result of the monsoon rains (Paras. 1-2).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Scattered skirmishes were reported on 1 November by elements of the six US Marine battalions participating in Operation PRAIRIE in northernmost Quang Tri Province. A total of 12 North Vietnamese were killed by US Marines sweeping the area just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Cumulative casualties in this three-month-old operation total 1,210 Communists killed as compared with American casualties of 168 killed and 765 wounded.

2. Units of the US 4th and 25th Infantry Division, participating in Operation PAUL REVERE IV, reported killing more than 75 enemy troops on 31 October while sweeping an area in the central highlands of Pleiku Province near the Cambodian border. A total of 132 Communist soldiers have been killed since this phase of the operation began on 17 October. American casualties total 22 killed and 114 wounded. Ten US Army battalions have now been committed to this border surveillance operation.

US Naval Activity

3. US patrol boats and armed helicopters sank, damaged, or captured more than 60 Viet Cong sampans and junks in a three-hour battle the night of 31 October. Two Viet Cong were reported killed in a battle on the My Tho River in the Mekong delta about 47 miles southwest of Saigon. Eight US Navy patrol boats, assisted by rocket-firing helicopters, engaged over 80 Viet Cong river vessels and reported sinking or damaging 64 sampans or junks. Three VC craft were captured. No American casualties were reported.

4. A US Navy minesweeper struck a Communist mine and sank in the Long Tau River about 15 miles southeast of Saigon early on 1 November. Four Americans aboard the 57-foot, wooden-hulled vessel were wounded and two others are reported missing. The river channel remains open to shipping.

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5. An accompanying minesweeper received heavy small-arms and automatic weapons fire from an enemy force of unknown size for about ten minutes following the incident, but no casualties were sustained.

6. This is the 15th time that one of the 12 ships of Mine Squadron 11 has been attacked since its arrival in South Vietnam seven months ago. The primary mission of this squadron is to combat the Viet Cong's efforts to cut the sea lanes to Saigon.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. During its afternoon session on 31 October, the Constituent Assembly elected Dinh Thanh Chau, a young northern lawyer, as chairman of the important constitution drafting committee. Chau was the candidate of the Peoples Bloc, and his election was an apparent demonstration of the bloc's solidarity. This group, with 44 members mostly from north and central Vietnam, is the largest of the four formal political blocs which were officially formed during the morning session on 31 October. The US Embassy has commented that Chau's election will mean clear dominance of the important drafting committee by the Peoples Bloc.

2. Following Chau's election, Giap Van Thap, a Saigon area member of the Southern Renaissance bloc, criticized the government for having invited only five members of the assembly to attend the 1 November National Day ceremony. His proposal that the assembly should demonstrate its independence by attending the parade en masse and standing with the people rather than with other government officials was received enthusiastically by a large majority. The acting chairman, however, refused to allow a vote on the suggestion and finally had to adjourn the session when the deputies continued to press the issue. The acting chairman, a southern Hoa Hao member and an army lieutenant colonel, later explained that the government was not at fault, since the assembly leadership itself had previously requested only five invitations. Nevertheless, the incident reflects the touchy feelings of many deputies regarding the status of the assembly vis-a-vis the military government.

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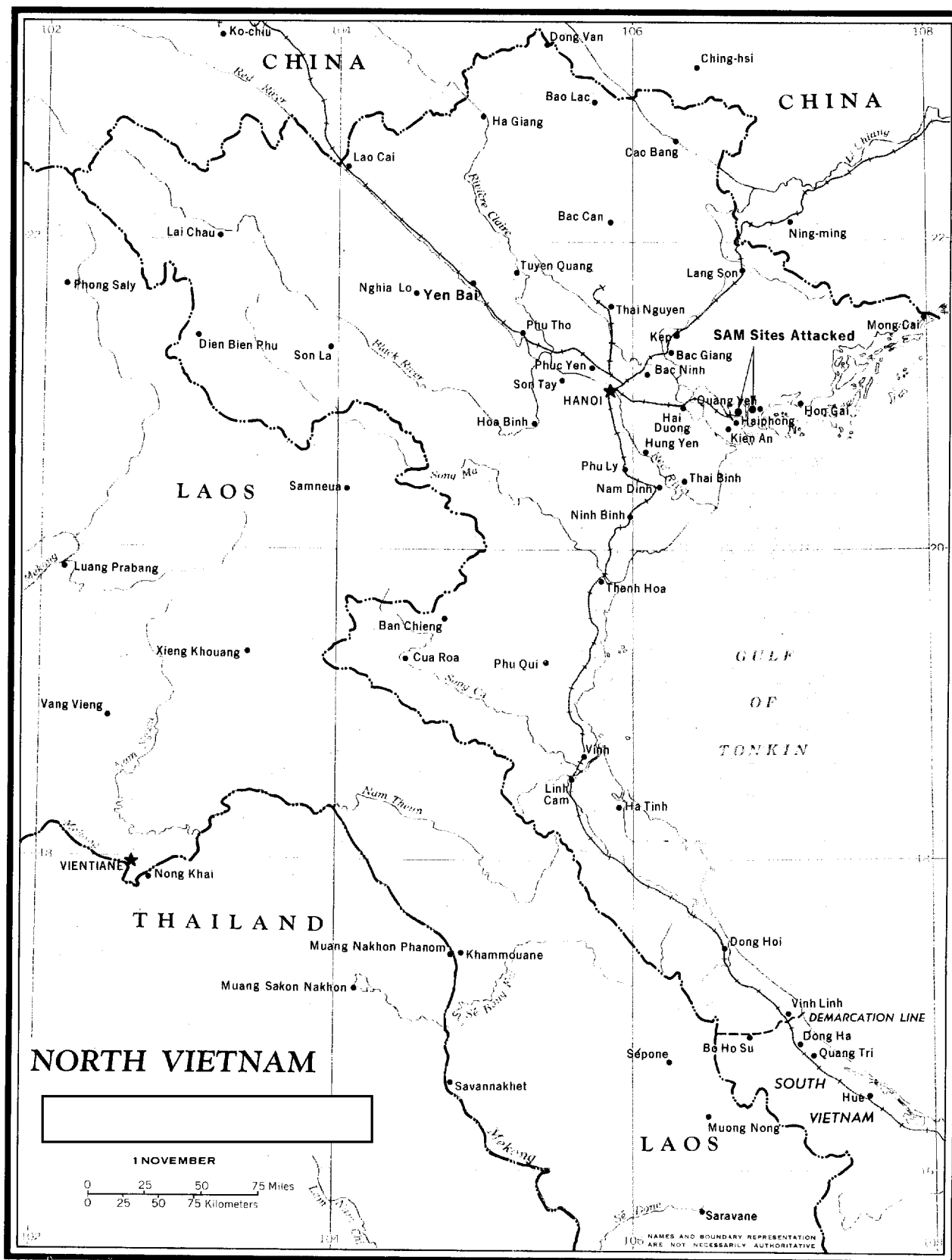
3. The assembly's remaining organizational tasks include selection of subcommittees for information and press, budget and finance, and for "people's aspirations." The assembly is then scheduled to hold a debate on the general principles of the constitution. Once the principles are approved, the drafting committee will prepare a general outline of the constitution, submit it for assembly approval, and then begin writing the individual articles. The entire constitution must be approved by an absolute majority of the assembly no later than 27 March.

Political Conditions in Hue

4. In the wake of reports that the "struggle movement" might resume in the Hue area on or about 1 November, local officials have recently been alternating between measures of firmness and conciliation. The chief of Thua Thien Province, for example, issued a communiqué on 22 October offering members of the "struggle movement" who are still in hiding a ten-day period in which to report to the government and receive amnesty. After that time, the communiqué warned, all such persons would be tracked down by the police and the army. According to the province chief, the communiqué was primarily directed at a number of Buddhist monks and others who have been hiding in the countryside, but who have no Communist ties and fear the Viet Cong as much as the government. As yet, there have been no reports of any antigovernment incidents connected with the National Day in the Hue area.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. North Vietnam's treatment of the recently concluded Congress of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) provides one of the clearest indications in recent months of Hanoi's willingness to adopt a line counter to that of Peking in matters relating to the Sino-Soviet dispute. In sharp contrast to Peking's cool and terse references to the Congress, Hanoi's propaganda has been warm and fraternal, referring to the meeting as a "brilliant success" and to the JCP as the "glorious vanguard of the Japanese working class and people."

2. The DRV's endorsement of recent efforts by the JCP to maintain a line independent of both Peking and Moscow is a reflection of Hanoi's own policy. Hanoi is also pleased over the JCP's repeated call for united action on behalf of Vietnam.

3. Prior to the opening of the congress, Hanoi announced its intention to send a delegation to the congress headed by politburo member Le Duc Tho. Due to the Japanese Government's opposition, the DRV delegation was barred from attending the congress along with representatives of all other parties. This was the first time that the North Vietnamese designated a figure of politburo rank to attend the congress of a party that was not in power.

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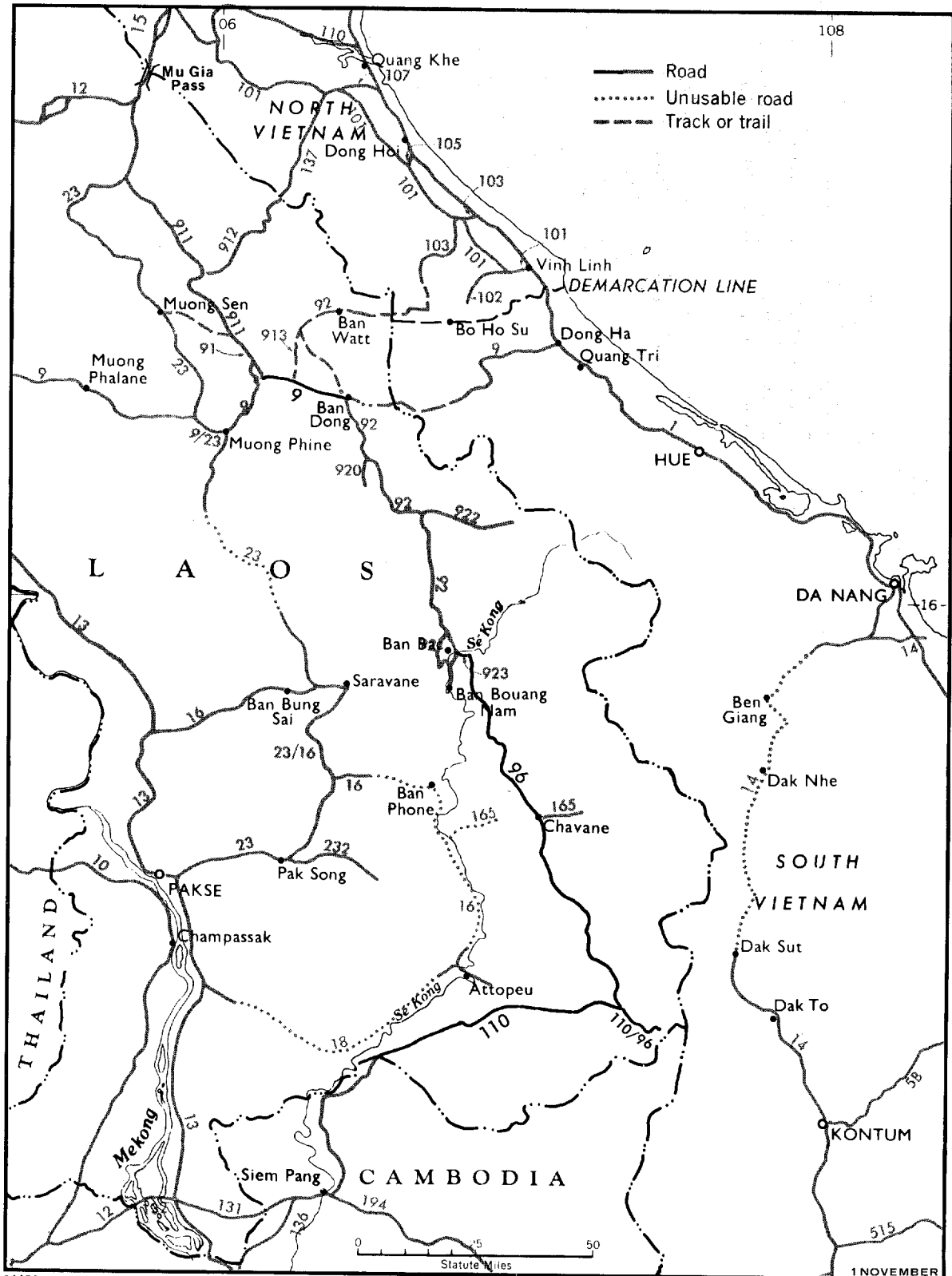
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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Inclement weather during late October in the Laotian panhandle prevented observation of the Mu Gia Pass area and probably reduced the rising level of Communist trucking which was noted in the pass during September and early October. Reports of trucking activity during October are confined to the area north of Route 9 and appear to reflect Communist efforts to pre-position equipment rather than attempts to send supplies to South Vietnam.

2. The roads below Route 9, with the exception of Route 110 parallel to the Cambodian border, appear generally unserviceable. Aerial photography [redacted] indicates Route 96 will not permit truck traffic. No efforts to repair the numerous landslides on this road have been noted. Although photography indicates Route 110 (the Sihanouk Trail) can handle limited truck traffic, ground reports as of the end of October do not indicate that trucks have resumed use of the route.

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